

Amusement ride inspectors work to keep fairgoers safe

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Our Agri-Culture

FRANKFORT, Ky. — Along with a variety of crop, this is the season when fairs and festivals spring up in counties across the United States and family vacation trips include an all-day outing to a favorite amusement park. With these activities come rides and attractions that must be inspected to provide the safest possible environment for all to live through and enjoy. Amusement ride safety is a growing national concern. As a result, many states have sprung into action by using trained inspectors to reduce accidents. The Kentucky Department of Agriculture's (KDA) Division of Regulation and Inspection (DRI) has the responsibility of performing safety checks on rides throughout the state to ensure proper protection for the consumer.

"Our inspectors check all details of the rides and make sure they are as safe as possible for the public," said Agriculture Commissioner Richie Farmer. "They are well-trained to keep things safe so the people who attend these events can have a good time. Safety is always our No. 1 concern in our role as a consumer protection and service agency."

"Since the inception of the ride inspection program in 1984, there has been a decline in Kentucky incidents," said Amusement Branch Manager Chad Halsey. "We expect this trend to continue. Commissioner Farmer is conscious of safety and leads by example."

During the month of April, 21 Kentucky DRI staff members attended a one week professional development training session to become certified as inspectors and cross-trained to help with the tremendous work load across the state. The session was coordinated by two instructors from the National Assoc. of Amusement Ride Safety Officials (NAARSO). Of the 21 staff members who attended the training, only five are full time ride inspectors. "To me, the job of inspection is getting harder each year because the rides are more technologically advanced and much bigger. Technology has made a big step and we need to keep up," said Halsey. "We are trying to get everyone cross-trained in DRI so that all inspectors are trained in all aspects of the division,"

According to a recent KDA press release, 836 inspections were performed on mobile rides and 615 on permanent rides in 2004. While Halsey can only speculate, he expects this year's numbers to exceed those from last year because he has seen an increase in the number of businesses they have to inspect. This is primarily because the number of *air inflatables* has increased.

"Anyone providing an amusement ride device, (including McDonalds and other food vendors because of their play areas and Laser Tag centers), is required to have a *ride sticker* to indicate it has been inspected," said



**INSTRUCTIONS FOR ASSEMBLING a
ride are posted on the side**

Halsey. "This also includes go-cart tracks, simulators, bumper boats and cars, climbing walls, mechanical bulls, air inflatables, trackless trains, portable carnival rides and permanent amusement park rides and chair lifts."

In Kentucky, first time operators of amusement rides are required to undergo an initial inspection. A *ride sticker* is issued if the inspection is passed – this is good using a January through December calendar year. Renewal notices are sent out to all vendors to set up repeat inspections on a yearly basis.

"Periodically throughout the year, we recheck devices to make sure they still meet safety requirements," Halsey said. "Inspections begin in January and continue year round."

Many states are now training and certifying employees to perform inspections through NAARSO. Based in Brandon, FL, the organization was created to assist government agencies and their employees in promoting, educating and understanding amusement ride safety.

According to the information on NAARSO's website, the organization is concerned with uniformity and the continual flow of information and ideas with which to improve amusement ride safety. Members of the organization are eligible to attend a safety forum; complete with hands-on instruction designed to help those who inspect amusement rides.

NAARSO provides three Inspector Certification Programs that include Level I, (Basic); Level II, (Advanced); and Level III (Senior). Applicants must complete a set of requirements for each level in order to become certified as an Inspector of Amusement Rides and Devices. A written examination for Levels 1 and 2 are conducted by at least two members of the NAARSO Examination Board.

Level I participants are required to pass with a minimum grade of 75 percent, while Level II applicants must attain a minimum grade of 80 percent. Level III Senior certification is achieved when the applicant has met all the requirements of and currently holds a Level II certification.

Other requirements apply including experience, training and employment. NAARSO certification for each level is valid for two years and expires on March 31.

In Kentucky, contact Chad Halsey at 502-573-0282 for information on how to get a ride inspected or to report a ride without an inspection sticker.

For more information regarding NAARSO, call toll-free 800-669-9053, fax 813-685-5117 or visit the website at <http://www.naarso.com>

For more information on dates of local agricultural fairs in Kentucky, click on the following website:

http://www.kyagr.com/mkt_promo/fair/local%20fairs/index.htm